

JAILED PASTOR 'WAIVES' APPEAL RIGHTS

Friends worry government statement conceals case facts

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The government in Uzbekistan says a Christian pastor who was jailed after he was accused of being an "imposter" now allegedly has "voluntarily" renounced his right to appeal his case and "begged" to be transferred immediately to be punished, a scenario his friends and acquaintances have reported is unlikely.

According to the Forum 18 news report, friends of pastor Dmitry Shestakov report the claim came during a recent court hearing in his case, in which he was ordered to a work camp for four years after the government accused him of preaching without authorization.



Pastor Dmitry Shestakov, sentenced to exile for leading Christians in Uzbekistan (Voice of the Martyrs photo)

The case originally was reported by [Voice of the Martyrs](#), which said Shestakov was simply pursuing a Christian ministry to his government-authorized church.

"This is an example of what our Uzbek brothers and sisters face in their country," said Todd Nettleton, director of media development for [VOM](#). "This is a government that says they give their citizens

religious freedom, but that is clearly not the case."

Friends of Shestakov say they are becoming increasingly concerned about his health and fate after the May 1 hearing at which government officials said Shestakov had signed the request voluntarily on April 25, seeking the immediately start of his sentence, because of his "poor health," Forum 18 reports said.

That would be especially unusual since he had lodged an appeal just a month earlier over his sentence, and had complained that his case wasn't being heard in a timely fashion.

Shestakov, who celebrated his 38th birthday in detention, had been sentenced on March 9 to the work camp, and his appeal should have been heard in Andijan Regional Criminal Court on May 1.

Protestant sources told Forum 18 the court's statement in lieu of a hearing said Shestakov "voluntarily" signed the document.

Authorities within Uzbekistan have declined to respond to questions from Forum 18 about the status of the case or reveal where the pastor is being held.

Shestakov was arrested in January during a raid on his Full Gospel Church in Andijan, Uzbekistan. He was accused by Uzbekistan's Religious Affairs Committee of not being an "authorized leader" of an "officially-recognized" religious group, even though the evangelical pastor is affiliated with the registered Full Gospel Church.